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ABSTRACT

This module, intended for use by special education teachers, defines pragmatics as the ability to use verbal and nonverbal language to take part in a conversation, based on the situation and the conversational partner. It provides responses to seven frequently asked questions about pragmatics and the transition from school to working life for special education students. An example of an observational checklist is provided; 3 references are listed; 13 resources, including addresses and telephone numbers of publishers, are included; and a teacher observation form is provided. (CML)

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TITLE: PRAGMATICS



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ABSTRACT: Information is provided on pragmatics, what it is, why
it is important in transition programming and how
students with poor pragmatic skills can be identified.
Also included are: a list of resources, a pragmatics
checklist and a teacher observation form.

CE 055373

PRAGMATICS

It has been only recently that pragmatic skills have gained the attention of speech pathologists and special educators. Special education personnel were uncertain about the meaning of the term pragmatics when it was first introduced. They were uncertain about what it entailed with respect to programming considerations, and what part it played in future employability. Pragmatics is listed as a separate area of disordered language in the speech and language guidelines for the State of Missouri.

Definitions/Technology

PRAGMATICS: The ability to use verbal and nonverbal language to take part in a conversation, based on the situation and the conversational partner.

TRANSITION: The transition from school to working life is an outcome oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional post-secondary education or adult services, and the initial years of employment. Transition is the bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and risks of adult life. Any bridge requires both a solid span and a secure foundation at either end. The transition from school to work and adult life requires sound preparation in the secondary school, adequate support at the point of school leaving, and secure opportunities and services, if needed, in adult situations (Will, 1984).

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. WHAT IS PRAGMATICS?

A. Pragmatics is the ability to use verbal and nonverbal language to take part in a conversation based on the situation and the conversational partner.

"We do not experience language in isolation--if we did we would not recognize it as language--but always in relation to a scenario, some background of persons and actions and events from which the things are said to derive their meaning" (Halliday, 1974, p.28).

Q. WHY IS PRAGMATICS SO IMPORTANT IN A TRANSITION PROGRAM?

A. Communication competencies are necessary for successful education and work experiences. Without pragmatic skills, many children and adolescents are not able to make communication work for them. When their meanings and motives are misinterpreted, they can experience discouragement, a sense of failure, potential employer problems, poor social relationships, and possible juvenile delinquency (Pippes, Ryan & Underwood, 1989).

Q. HOW CAN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH POOR PRAGMATIC SKILLS BE IDENTIFIED?

A. Perhaps the most effective technique is observation. There are very few tests designed to evaluate children and adolescents in this area. Teachers might use functional pragmatics check-lists to assist them in identifying students at risk for pragmatic deficiencies. This checklist might be completed by a few different teachers and then the speech therapist is able to look for patterns. (A sample checklist is attached in the resources section of this module).

Another useful tool is an open-ended survey that the teacher completes after observing the student in class. It may become apparent that a student performs well in a class with a lecture format and does not perform well in a class which requires participation. A survey completed by several different teachers would make this apparent. (A sample teacher observation survey is attached in the resources section of this module.)

Q. IS THERE A TEST AVAILABLE THAT MIGHT BE USED TO ASSESS STUDENTS IN PRAGMATICS?

A. A test that is used by the Marshall School District is the Interpersonal Language Skills Assessment by Nancy McDonnell and Carolyn Hayden. This test is available through Lingui Systems and their address can be found in the resource section of this module. The Marshall School District has found this instrument to be useful; however, one drawback is that it takes about two and one-half hours to administer.

Q. WHAT TYPE OF CHARACTERISTICS DO PRAGMATICALLY-IMPAIRED STUDENTS DISPLAY?

A. Characteristics that are common include, but are not limited to:

1. Poor comprehension of Wh-Questions (who, what, when, where, why)
2. Failure to understand indirect question forms (e.g., "Would you.....?" "Could you.....?", etc.)

PRAGMATIC CHECKLIST

Student Name _____ Date _____ School _____
 Clinician _____ CA _____ MA _____

These factors should be considered and may be used to validate the language severity rating and provide behavioral/functional language data. Check () as appropriate.

FACTORS	Normal S.R. 0	Almost Always S.R. 1	Frequently S.R. 2	Occasionally S.R. 3	Seldom S.R. 4
1. Does the student have adequate eye contact during conversation?					
2. Does the student respond appropriately to questions?					
3. Does the student respond to questions without needing frequent repetitions?					
4. Does the student respond to questions within a normal length of time?					
5. Does the student initiate verbal interaction?					
6. Does the student produce responses that are adequate in length to communicate the intended thought?					
7. Does the student verbally sequence events correctly?					
8. Does the student share talking time, not interrupting, while another person speaks?					
9. Does the student provide sufficient information for the listener to understand the topic of the conversation?					
10. Does the student stay on topic?					
11. Does the student use adequate vocabulary, not relying excessively on non-specific words such as "thing", "stuff", etc.?					
12. Does the student have a smooth flow of speech, with few hesitations or revisions?					

Functional Language Severity Rating Check () below

_____ 0 - Normal _____ 1 - Developmental _____ 2 - Mild _____ 3 - Moderate _____ 4 - Severe

- Shawnee Mission Public Schools

3. Failure to stay on a topic or change a topic in an appropriate manner.
4. Minimal or no use of ritualistic social expressions (e.g., "How are you," "See you later," or "Take care."

Q. ARE THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC SKILLS THE SAME AT ALL AGE LEVELS?

A. No, they are not the same and a sample of the objectives that might be addressed at different levels are:

Elementary: Initiating a conversation
 Taking turns in a conversation
 Asking for/giving permission
 Responding to indirect remarks

Junior High: Requesting information
 Ritualizing
 Handling Emergency Situations
 Expressing feelings

Secondary Level: General meaning of the term
 communication
 Characteristics of a conversation
 Giving/taking messages
 Apologizing

Q. HOW CAN PRAGMATIC SKILLS BE ADDRESSED BY TEACHERS?

A. Various techniques may be utilized at the different grade levels. It is important that the speech pathologist and teacher work together on these skills. Training sessions at the elementary level might focus on role-playing techniques, puppetry and teacher modeling.

At the junior high level, role-playing techniques, telephone conversations and the use of gestures and expressions to convey messages are emphasized in training sessions.

At the senior high level, role playing with emphasis on verbal and non-verbal communication parameters can be utilized. The special education and vocational education classroom is an excellent place to address pragmatic skills. Intervention approaches can be based on real life situations and group interaction.

References

1. Pippes, M., Ryan, J. & Underwood, A. (1989). Pragmatics: The Transition Link. University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, MO.
2. Will, M. (June, 1984). Bridges from School to Work Life, Interchange, 2-6.
3. Haliday, M.A.K. (1974). Language and Social Man. Schools Council Program in Linguistics and English Teaching. Paper series II, Volume 3. London: Longman for the School's Council.

Resources

A list of possible resources has been compiled to assist with the development of a pragmatic curriculum.

1. HELP - Handbooks of Exercises for Language Processing. Lingu Systems, Inc., 716 17th Street, Moline, IL 61265 - 1-800-ALL TIME.
2. On My Own with Language - A Program of Real World Language Sessions. - Lingu Systems, Inc., 716 17th Street, Moline, IL 61265 1-800-ALL TIME.
3. Communication Workshop - Comprehensive curriculum to improve the social language and interaction skills of LD students. Lingu Systems, Inc., 716 17th Street, Moline, IL 61265 1-800-ALL TIME.
4. RAPP - Resource of Activities for Peer Pragmatics. Lingu Systems, Inc., 716 17th Street, Moline, IL 61265, 1-800-ALL TIME.
5. Manual of Exercises for Expressive Reasoning - A comprehensive problem-solving manual. Lingu Systems, Inc., 716 17th Street, Moline, IL 61265 - 1-800 ALL TIME.
6. MEER IMAGES - Uses pictures to teach problem solving. Lingu Systems, Inc., 716 17th Street, Moline, IL 61265, 1-800 ALL TIME.
7. SCOR - Sequential Communication Objectives for Remediation. Comprehensive source of communication goals and objectives. Lingu Systems, Inc., 716 17th Street, Moline, IL 61265 - 1-800 ALL TIME.

8. Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child and Skillstreaming the Adolescent. Research Press, P.O. Box 3177, Department 69, Champaign, IL 61821. Also available as a loan package through SEDC, 401 E. Stewart Road, Columbia MO 65211, (800) 392-7340 or (314) 882-3594.
9. ACHIEVE Vocabulary Program - Activities for Children Involving Everyday Vocabulary. Lingui, Systems, Inc., 716 17th Street, Moline, IL 61265 - 1-800-ALL TIME.
10. Let's Talk for Children
Let's Talk for Adolescents
Bray, C.M., and Wigg, E.H. (1983). Columbus, OH: Charles C. Merrill Publishing Company.
11. A Sourcebook of Pragmatic Activities: Theory and Intervention for Language Therapy (PK-6) (1984). Johnston, E.B., Wienrich, B.D., and Johnson, A.R.
12. Communication Skill Builders, 3130 N. Dodge Boulevard, P.O. Box 42050, Tucson, AZ 86733, (602) 323-7500.
13. Interpersonal Language Skills Assessment by Nancy McConnell and Carolyn Hayden. Lingui Systems, Inc., 716 17th Street, Moline, IL 61265 - 1-800 ALL TIME. Catalogue #1351, cost: \$34.90.

(1989)

TEACHER OBSERVATION

The student named below has been referred for evaluation. Please complete each sentence and return to staffing coordinator.

Student Name _____ Date _____

Teacher Name _____ Subject _____

1. This student is different from the rest of my students because ... _____

2. This student is most like the rest of the class when ... _____

3. The intellectual capability or potential of this student seems to be ... _____

Is the student's performance commensurate with perceived ability? _____

4. Academically, this student can ... _____

5. Academically, this student can't ... _____

6. This student's home environment appears to be ... _____

7. When interacting with peers, he/she ... _____

8. When experiencing difficulty this student responds by ... _____

9. In my class, this student is currently receiving a grade of _____.

10. Any other pertinent information ... _____

(use other side if necessary)